



Choosing Your HIV Healthcare Provider

WHY IS CHOOSING AN HIV HEALTHCARE PROVIDER IMPORTANT?

Treating HIV can be complicated. It's best if you and your healthcare provider work together as a team. That makes it easier to choose and stick to your treatment plan. Healthcare provider means a doctor, physician assistant, or nurse practitioner.

There are several issues you may want to consider in choosing an HIV healthcare provider. You might decide to have them be your primary care provider (PCP) for all of your health issues. You might use a PCP for most health issues and use your HIV provider as a specialist. If your regular provider isn't an HIV specialist, be sure they regularly get expert advice on HIV issues.

TRAINING AND EXPERIENCE

Many people with HIV get treatment from healthcare providers who are specialists in infectious diseases. Now that people are living longer with HIV it's important to deal with all of your health issues. You might prefer to have a family practitioner or a specialist in internal medicine as your PCP.

No matter what their specialty, you will get better HIV care from healthcare providers who have experience treating people at all stages of HIV disease. Be sure to ask how many people with HIV they have treated and how many they currently see. People with HIV do better when their healthcare providers have more experience treating HIV disease.

DO YOU HAVE SIMILAR IDEAS ABOUT TREATING HIV?

Some providers are conservative, and they prefer tried and true methods. Others are more aggressive and are willing to try new and experimental treatments. Some are optimistic by nature and focus on the hopeful or positive side when they talk about test results or future prospects. Others are more pessimistic.

Some providers are comfortable suggesting complementary and alternative therapies such as massage or acupuncture. Others stick strictly to western medicine.

If you want a lot of emotional support, you probably won't be comfortable with a healthcare provider who only talks about test results. The more comfortable you are with their approach to HIV treatment, the easier it will be for you to get the kind of healthcare you want. Talk to several healthcare providers and the people they treat before you make your choice.

THE HEALTHCARE PROVIDER PATIENT RELATIONSHIP

Many people do better when they take an active role in planning their own healthcare. These people do a lot of reading on their own and bring information to their healthcare providers. They work with their providers to make healthcare decisions.

Other people are more comfortable with their healthcare provider making important decisions. Think about how you want to work with your healthcare provider. See if that fits with the way your healthcare provider likes to work with people.

HELP YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER HELP YOU

Make sure that your healthcare provider has all the information needed to give the best advice about your treatment. This starts with your medical records, which may have to be transferred from another office. When you start working with a new healthcare provider, they will probably do a lot of tests to collect baseline information. This helps you see how well you're doing as time goes by.

Be sure your healthcare provider knows how you feel about using medications and about your illness. Some people don't mind taking a lot of pills. Other people would rather take as few as possible. Are you willing to change your diet or the amount of exercise you do? Your healthcare provider should also know about other treatments you are using or want to try, including non-medical ones.

Be honest about your lifestyle. Your eating, sleeping, and working patterns can make a difference for your healthcare. So can your sexual practices and use of alcohol, tobacco, and drugs. If your healthcare provider seems too judgmental, try to change providers. It's better to have a healthcare provider who really knows you instead of holding back information.

Let your healthcare provider know about the important people in your life: the people who will support you if you get sick or will help you make important medical decisions.

AVAILABILITY

The best healthcare provider won't do you any good if you can't get in to see them. Ask them (or their receptionist) how long it usually takes to get an appointment. Find out how well they usually stay on schedule during the day.

The type of insurance you have could limit your choice of a healthcare provider. Maybe they aren't on the list for your health maintenance organization (HMO) or insurance plan. Be sure to find out how you will be able to pay for their services.

Remember, you don't need an HIV specialist to help you with most of your healthcare needs. If a good HIV healthcare provider is hard to find, or if it's hard to get an appointment, use a non-HIV care provider for your general healthcare. Just be sure that when you are dealing with HIV issues, you see an experienced HIV provider or one who consults with an expert in HIV.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Some people are very concerned about keeping their HIV status private. You might choose to get your HIV care from a healthcare provider in another town to protect your privacy. You will need to find your own balance between confidentiality and convenience.

CHANGING HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

Your healthcare needs might change as time goes by. Also, your ideas about treatment could change. Although you will probably get better medical care from a healthcare provider who has known you for a long time, you always have the right to stop seeing one healthcare provider and change to another.

TO FIND A HEALTHCARE PROVIDER . . .

You can get help finding a healthcare provider from your case manager or from your local health department. You can also ask other people with HIV.

[Check our list of resources](#) for lots of information about HIV, finding a healthcare provider, getting on insurance, paying for treatment, and finding services you need.

THE BOTTOM LINE

HIV medical care can be complicated and changes quickly. This makes it important to find an HIV healthcare provider who works with people with HIV/AIDS and is committed to staying up to date. Your relationship with an HIV healthcare provider will be better if you are comfortable with each other's personal style and approach to dealing with health issues in general and HIV in particular.

MORE INFORMATION

[Find HIV care services](#) near you

HRSA Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program: [About the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program](#)

HRSA Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program: [State HIV/AIDS Hotlines](#)

HRSA Data Warehouse: [Find a Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program Medical Provider](#)

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